Study addresses coverage of BPA and GMOs: How ideological interests skew interpretation of contested science

When controversies develop around scientific facts or technologies, the potential of science to become a tool in plays of interests and power between different actors is not well recognized. Cordner's concept of Strategic Science Translation (SST) shows that such actions are enabled by the uncertainty and the complexity of the scientific processes that allow the use of science in support of various, often contradictory interests and goals.

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In this paper, we… follow how actors "reinterpret" science to serve their interests in two controversies involving animal toxicity studies and their potential relevance for risk assessment in the regulatory context: a two-year rat feeding study in the field of genetically modified (GM) food and an animal study on Bisphenol-A (BPA), a substance widely used in food packaging. Both studies triggered high-profile controversies in the EU.

…

[I]nterest groups, especially businesses, can use (and potentially distort) science to push policy in desired directions. They can also present their version of scientific facts, while insisting that policy should only be based on what they portray as 'sound science.' Although this phrase seems to indicate evidence-based policy, 'sound science' was first used by the tobacco industry as a public relations strategy to perpetrate doubt over cigarettes causing cancer.[7]

To advance their position, by claiming that it is supported by "sound science," interest groups can also use data published in predatory journals. Published with minimal or without peer-review and quality checks, articles included in these journals are providing evidence of unclear and sometimes little quality while still pretending to [have] scientific robustness.[8] The business model of predatory journals has been very successful, with estimates of 15,000 predatory journals in 2020.

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